

Message Text

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CINCPAC

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

S E C R E T BANGKOK 1851

LIMDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y T E X T

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SUBJ: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES OF A DEMOCRAT DOMINATED
COALITION GOVERNMENT

REF : BANGKOK 1830

SUMMARY. AS BARGAINING FOR CABINET POSITIONS PROCEEDS FEB 1,
WE WOULD LIKE TO MAKE SOME PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS ON THE
IMPLICATIONS TO THE US OF A DEMOCRAT DOMINATED COALITION
GOVERNMENT. WE EXPLORED THE CHARACTER AND THE VIEWS OF LIKELY
PRIME MINISTER SENI PRAMOT IN BANGKOK 1838. SENI IS WELL DISPOSED
TOWARD THE US BUT AS A THAI NATIONALIST DOES NOT LOOK WITH
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ENTHUSIASM ON THE STATIONING OF FOREIGN TROOPS OF ANY STRIPE ON

THAI SOIL. WE WOULD NOT EXPECT SENI TO CALL FOR IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL OF US TROOPS FROM THAILAND BUT WE WOULD EXPECT THE US MILITARY PRESENCE TO COME UNDER CLOSER SCRUTINY UNDER A DEMOCRAT REGIME THAN UNDER A COALITION OF CONSERVATIVE PARTIES. END SUMMARY.

1. FOR THE THAI, THE KEY MINISTRIES ARE INTERIOR, DEFENSE, FINANCE, AGRICULTURE, INDUSTRY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS. INTERIOR WITH ITS PERVASIVE GRIP THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY APPEARS TO BE THE KEY POINT OF DISPUTE BETWEEN A DEMOCRAT-THAI NATION ALLIANCE. THE DEMOCRATS WANT TO KEEP THE HIGHLY RESPECTED AND POLITICALLY NEUTRAL INCUMBENT IN THAT PORTFOLIO, BUT THAI NATION WANTS ONE OF ITS OWN MEN. GENERAL KRIT SIWARE HAS APPARENTLY GAVE HIS PAPAL BLESSING TO A DEMOCRAT-DOMINATED COALITION BUT HAS REPORTEDLY INSISTED ON A DEFENSE MINISTER WITH MILITARY BACKGROUND. THAI NATION'S CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN, WHO GAVE UP HIS GENERAL'S STARS FOR STRIPED PANTS AS LONG AGO AS 1957, MAY TURN OUT TO BE THAT MAN. FINANCE AND INDUSTRY ARE PARTICULARLY KEY PORTFOLIOS BECAUSE THEY PERMIT THE MANIPULATION OF THE MONETARY AND BUSINESS LEVERS OF THE COUNTRY. INDUSTRY HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN A POST FOR GREAT PERSONAL ENRICHMENT, WHICH IN TURN HAS ENABLED INCUMBENTS TO WIELD POLITICAL POWER BY ATTRACTING SUPPORTERS WITH CASH AND OTHER LUCRATIVE ENTICEMENTS. AGRICULTURE REPRESENTS THE BULK OF THE THAI POPULATION, AND A MAJOR SOURCE OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE.

2. FOR THE US, THE KEY MINISTRIES ARE FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE. THERE WERE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO IN OUR AT LEAST TEMPORARILY SUCCESSFUL RECENT ATTEMPT TO ACHIEVE A RTG PUBLIC STATION ON THE SITUATION IN INDOCHINA WHICH LEFT THE INFERENCE THAT TROOP WITHDRAWALS FROM THAILAND AT A TIME OF HEIGHTENED NORTH VIETNAMESE AND KHMER COMMUNIST AGGRESSION IN INDOCHINA WOULD GIVE THE WRONG SIGNALS TO HANOI.

3. OUR CONTACTS WITH SEVERAL THAI INDICATE THAT THE DEMOCRATS MAY WANT TO INVITE INCUMBENT MINISTER CHARUNPHAN ITSARANGKUN NA AYUTTHAYA TO CONTINUE IN THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS ROLE. ALTHOUGH CHARUNPHAN HAS TOLD SEVERAL OF US ABOUT HIS FATIGUE IN THE JOB, AND DESCRIBED AN IDYLIC PICTURE OF RETIREMENT AMID UNREAD BOOKS AND GOLF CLUBS, WE CANNOT BE CERTAIN THAT HE WOULD REFUSE AN INVITATION TO SERVE AGAIN. WE WOULD EXPECT HIM TO CONTINUE HIS BASIC POLICY OF INCREASED EMPHASIS ON RELATIONS WITH THAILAND'S
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IMMEDIATE NEIGHBORS IN SOUTHEAST ASIS, AND A SLOW DEPARTURE FROM THE EXTREMELY CLOSE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US. CHARUNPHAN WAS MOST RELUCTANT IN LATE JANUARY TO COME UP WITH A PUBLIC STATEMENT THAT THAILAND COULD NOT CURRENTLY CONTEMPLATE DRAWDOWNS IN THE US PRESENCE BECAUSE OF THE INDOCHINA SITUATION. WE WOULD EXPECT HIM TO PRESS FOR TROOP DRAWDOWNS BEFORE WE WOULD LIKE THEM TO OCCUR.

4. SHOULD CHARUNPHAN REFUSE, THE NEXT INVITEE IN LINE IS APPARENTLY THAI AMBASSADOR TO THE US AND THE UN ANAN PANYARACHUN. ANAN KNOWS US TOO WELL, AND TAKES AN EXTREMELY PESSIMISTIC VIEW OF THE WILLINGNESS OF THE US CONGRESS EVER AGAIN TO PERMIT THE EMPLOYMENT OF THAI-BASED FORCES IN INDOCHINA COMBAT. HE THEREFORE DOES NOT SEE THEIR NECESSITY. WE BELIEVE HE WAS INSTRUMENTAL LAST JULY IN THE THAI GOVERNMENT REFUSAL TO PERMIT P-3 RE-CONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS OVER THE INDIAN OCEAN. WE COULD EXPECT ANAN TO BE VIGOROUS AND MUCH LESS POLITE THAN CHARUNPHAN IN HOLDING AMERICAN FEET TO THE FIRE. FOREIGN MINISTRY SOURCES INDICATE THAT ANAN WOULD ACCEPT AN INVITATION TO BECOME FOREIGN MINISTER FROM THE DEMOCRATS, BUT WOULD NOT HAVE DONE SO HAD THE CONSERVATIVE PARTIES BEEN ABLE TO FORM A COALITION.

5. THE NEXT CAREER MFA ALTERNATIVE IS THAI AMBASSADOR TO JAPAN, SOMPONG SUCHARITKUN. MFA SOURCES TELL US THAT SOMPONG IS SO MUCH OF AN OPPORTUNIST THAT HE WOULD ACCEPT THE PORTFOLIO, REGARDLESS OF WHO OFFERS IT. LIKE ANAN, SOMPONG IS AN EX-PRIVATE SECRETARY TO THANAT KHOMAN. WHILE BOTH HAVE ESCAPED THE MANTLE OF THEIR PROTECTOR THEY RETAIN SOME OF THANAT'S MORE QUIXOTIC VIEWS ABOUT THE US.

6. PHICHAI RATTAKUN, THE DEMOCRAT PARTY BACKER CLOSEST TO SENI, IS ANOTHER RUMORED POSSIBILITY FOR FOREIGN MINISTER, ALTHOUGH SEVERAL THAI INDICATED TO US THAT PHICHAI IS SO UNSURE OF HIS FOREIGN AFFAIRS CREDENTIALS THAT HE WOULD PREFER TO BE DEPUTY MINISTER UNDER AN EXPERIENCED MAN. PHICHAI USED TO HAVE RESERVATIONS ABOUT OUR TROOP PRESENCE, BUT HAS MELLOWED ON THAT SCORE IN THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS.

7. TURNING TO DEFENSE, WE WOULD EXPECT AN EASY DIALOGUE WITH CHATCHAI BUT ARE LESS CERTAIN WHETHER THAT DIALOGUE WOULD REDOUND TO OUR INTEREST. LIKE SOMPONG, CHATCHAI HAS ACQUIRED A NOT
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UNJUSTIFIED REPUTATION FOR OPPORTUNISM. CHATCHAI HAS NOT BEEN PARTICULARLY SYMPATHETIC TO OUR INDOCHINA RELATED MILITARY IMPERATIVES, BUT HAS CURIOUSLY COME OUT WITH SEVERAL PUBLIC STATEMENTS IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS INDICATING A THAI NEED FOR THE US MILITARY PRESENCE AS A BALANCE TO THE SOVIET UNION IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. HE APPEARS TO BE THE ONLY THAI OPENLY THINKING IN THIS DIRECTION.

8. IN SUM, WE SEE CONTINUED AND PERHAPS INCREASING PRESSURES AGAINST THE US PRESENCE UNDER A DEMOCRAT/THAI DOMINATED COALITION. WE BELIEVE THAT SENI AS THE TOP MAN WOULD NOT PRESS FOR IRRATIONAL TROOP WITHDRAWALS. SOME OF HIS KEY MINISTERS MAY THINK OTHERWISE AND THERE WILL PROBABLY BE COMPROMISES AMONG THEM. SINCE THE DEMOCRAT-DOMINATED GOVERNMENT IS MUCH MORE PLEASING TO THE THAI PUBLIC THAN A CONSERVATIVE COALITION OF THE

FORMER UNITED THAI PEOPLES PARTIES, SENI'S ACCESSION COULD
PORTEND THE BEGINNING OF A MUCH HEALTHIER LONG RANGE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN THAILAND AND THE US. MUCH WILL DEPEND ON THE FINAL
CABINET LINE-UP ONCE THE INTER-PARTY BARGAINING AND SHUFFLING IS
COMPLETED.
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